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SUBJECT: Draskovic: To Be Foreign Minister or Not to Be

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Summary

Q (SBU) Rumors abound about the future of Serbia and Montenegro Foreign Minister (FM), Vuk Draskovic, as his ministry is dissolved in the wake of the successful Montenegrin referendum. Although Serbia will create its own foreign ministry, insiders speculate that Draskovic (among others) could be slotted for the vacant deputy prime minister (DPM) position. In deciding Draskovic's future, Prime Minister Kostunica will need to play a careful balancing act in order to avoid alienating key members of his coalition and losing more parliamentary seats. Draskovic insists he has no intention of giving up the FM job for the DPM position. End Summary.

Draskovic: Weighing an Offer that May Never Come

12. (SBU) Even before the Montenegrins voted for independence, political insiders and journalists had begun to suggest that Draskovic would not be the Serbian Foreign Minister in a reorganized government. On issues ranging from Kosovo to NATO, Kostunica has been frustrated with the foreign minister's forward-leaning, pro-Western stances. The Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) has also been highly critical of Draskovic for similar reasons, and its current leader, Ivica Dacic, has said the party will not support Draskovic as Serbian foreign minister [Embassy Comment: The SPS is the unreformed party of Slobodan Milosevic, who tried to have Draskovic assassinated twice. The SPS' support is critical for the survival of Kostunica's government. End Comment].

13. (SBU) Several Embassy contacts have said that the GOS may offer to Draskovic the deputy prime minister position instead, which Miroljub Labus recently vacated, in order to keep Draskovic in government. It is a generally weaker position that would allow Draskovic to stay in the limelight, but largely sideline him from power. Nonetheless, several individuals close to Draskovic and the SPO have predicted that Draskovic would likely reject the DPM offer. Draskovic himself told an Embassy officer that he is not interested in the DPM job in exchange for the FM position.

14. (SBU) Alternatively, Milos Aligrudic, Chairman of the DSS parliamentary caucus, told poloff that Kostunica prefers to keep the current coalition arrangement that gives the SPO control over the foreign ministry. He added that the government can only count on 130 MPs in parliament and does not want to risk losing Draskovic and his three deputies, which would make governance difficult even though the coalition could survive. He said that the GOS is trying to find a compromise that will satisfy the SPO and

SPS and has even reached out to the opposition Democratic Party (DS) for support. Senic also noted that Draskovic hopes the DSS and the DS will provide enough votes to appoint him to be Serbian foreign minister, should the SPS threaten to vote down his nomination. Nonetheless, senior DS officials already have told Draskovic that they will not support a government measure to appoint Draskovic. If Draskovic does inherit the Serbian MFA, Senic said that the SPO could leave government after its main board meeting in June. He added, however, that the SPO is opposed to immediate elections, although anticipates them before the end of the year. In an interesting twist, one political insider told us 5/26 that Kostunica has also secured agreement from Nebojsa Covic's (SDP) two MPs to support the coalition in the event that Draskovic and his 3 MPs walk.

Biographic Note on Draskovic: The Nationalist Chameleon

15. (U) Vuk Draskovic was born to a Serbian family of colonists who populated Vojvodina after Tito expelled 500,000 ethnic Germans after World War II. In 1968, he graduated from the Faculty of Law at Belgrade University and worked as a journalist and later as chief of staff for a high-ranking communist official. In the 1980's, he became famous as a writer, whose fiction celebrated nationalism by dramatizing the egregious atrocities that Croats committed against Serbs during WW2. He often invokes images of the past in his speeches and has called for a return to the monarchy. Most recently, on May 21, 2006, he said, A constitutional parliamentary monarchy would be a sound foundation for Serbia to build on. Nonetheless, Senic told poloff that, while Draskovic may personally support a return of the monarchy, the SPO generally saw it as a vehicle to attract support from the 600,000 royalist Serbs and do not seriously consider it a likely or viable option.

6.(U) During the 1990's, Draskovic and his close
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friends, Vojislav Seselj (Draskovic's best man) and Mirko Jovic, founded the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO). Draskovic strongly supported the war against Croatia and sent his personal paramilitary force, the Serbian Guard, to fight there. Nonetheless, he had a falling out with Milosevic because of two factors: first, his rabid anti-communist sentiments; and second, he did not believe it was possible to carve out a separate Serb territory in Bosnia and thought doing so would reflect badly on Serbs and destroy Bosnia. As a result, he took his followers to the street in massive anti-government demonstrations.

17. (U) During this period, Milosevic's forces arrested and beat Draskovic and his wife, Danica. This event gained him sympathy from the international community and the acceptance of pro-democratic opposition leaders. Opposition forces won an election victory in 1996, but fell apart under strong pressure from Milosevic and internal squabbling. As they unraveled, Draskovic started to maneuver his party closer to Milosevic and made a deal to topple Djindjic for control of the Belgrade city government. Draskovic then joined Milosevic's Federal government and for a short time was Deputy Prime Minister. This relationship, however, fell apart at the height of the NATO bombing when Draskovic criticized Milosevic's handling of the Kosovo crisis. Milosevic retaliated by setting up two assassination attempts on Draskovic in 1999, in which his brother-in-law was killed, and June 2000. Nonetheless, in 2000, the electorate voted the SPO out of the parliament. Despite this, he resurrected himself and his party in 2003 as a tiny minority partner in the current coalition.

Comment

18. (SBU) Vuk Draskovic has become an ally of the United States and supports SaM joining NATO; two positions that undoubtedly have earned him the ire of the Socialists. The

Prime Minister may not be opposed to sidelining the vocal Foreign Minister by appointing him to amorphous deputy prime minister position, which did not carry much weight even under Labus. Nonetheless, his primary focus is keeping a manageable majority in parliament by any means necessary--a skill to which Kostunica has proved remarkably adept--and likely will keep Draskovic as foreign minister unless the SPS threatens to withdraw its support. As for Draskovic, his long-term prospects are questionable, with his party divided and performing terribly in the polls. Nonetheless, we should not count him out yet. He is an active voice in the Serbian political drama and has revived his political career on more than one occasion. End Comment.
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